

For Immediate Release

Contact: Paul Ettestad, Public Health Veterinarian, 827-0006,
Beth Velasquez, Public Information Officer, 827-2619, 470-2290,
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Four New West Nile Virus Cases Confirmed in New Mexico *State Total Climbs to 12*

SANTA FE -- The state Department of Health announced today that four adults, a 51-year-old man and a 38-year-old woman, both from Bernalillo County, and a 41-year-old man and a 16-year-old girl both from San Juan County, have tested positive for West Nile Virus infection. The Bernalillo County cases had only mild symptoms of the virus while the two San Juan County cases both had the severe form of the disease with neurological involvement. All four are recovering.

New Mexico's total number of West Nile Virus cases is now 12 with earlier cases occurring in residents from Bernalillo, Sandoval, San Juan, Eddy, Taos and Santa Fe Counties.

"These are the first human cases with mosquito exposure in Bernalillo County," said Paul Ettestad, the State Public Health Veterinarian for the New Mexico Department of Health. "There have been positive mosquito pools from both San Juan and Bernalillo Counties previously reported and it is likely that infected mosquitoes can be found throughout the entire state. It is important for people to take precautions to avoid mosquito bite exposure wherever they are."

The Department of Health continues to recommend that people take the following steps to reduce the risk of West Nile infection:

- Stay indoors at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks whenever you are outdoors.
- Use insect repellent products with no more than 35 percent DEET for adults and follow the directions on the label for children ages 2-12. Products containing soybean oil and eucalyptus oil have also been shown to be effective but need to be applied more often.
- Keep windows and doors closed if not screened. If you leave your house doors or windows open, make sure they have screens that fit tightly and have no holes.
- Do not allow water to stagnate in old tires, flowerpots, trash containers, swimming pools, birdbaths, pet bowls, etc. Tightly screen rain barrels or empty at least twice weekly.

- Horse owners should contact their veterinarian to have their horses vaccinated against West Nile Virus.

In 2003, New Mexico had a total of 209 laboratory-confirmed cases and four fatal cases of West Nile Virus.

“In people, West Nile Virus can cause flu-like symptoms such as fever, nausea, headache, and muscle aches,” said C. Mack Sewell, State Epidemiologist. “If someone feels they have the flu and are feeling sick, they should see their health care provider. Those over 50 years old are at most risk for serious disease from West Nile Virus.”

Both meningitis and encephalitis can be fatal, especially in the elderly. However, most people who become infected have either no symptoms or have only mild symptoms, and less than 1 percent of all people infected develop meningitis or encephalitis. Meningitis is an infection of the lining around the brain, while encephalitis is an infection of the brain itself.

In addition, the National Animal Poison Control Center, which is part of the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine, states that under no circumstance should insect repellants be used on pets. Cats are highly sensitive to these chemicals plus both dogs and cats tend to lick themselves and can ingest toxins, which could harm them significantly more than the West Nile Virus. Furthermore, only products marked specifically for use on dogs and cats should be used on pets. So far both species have been fairly resistant to the virus.